



To: Federal Communications Commission
From: John Bateson, Executive Director
Date: April 30, 2008
Proceeding: 07-271

I'm writing in favor of permanently awarding the number 800-SUICIDE, as well as 888-SUICIDE and 877-SUICIDA, to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Below is more information.

The Contra Costa Crisis Center was one of the first agencies to answer calls to 800-SUICIDE. We started in 1999 and continue today, nine years later. We also answer calls to 888-SUICIDE and 877-SUICIDA.

During the time that the Kristin Brooks Hope Center (KBHK) operated 800-SUICIDE, we experienced constant routing problems, routinely receiving calls from people far outside our designated area. Our ability to help them was compromised because we didn't know their local police jurisdictions to initiate emergency intervention in life-threatening situations, nor were we familiar with local resources to refer people to. It took many phone calls and email communications to KBHK before routing problems were corrected, and then only after we had to threaten to stop answering 800-SUICIDE calls altogether.

Of equal concern, promotion of the service under KBHK's management wasn't strategic, coordinated, or nearly as effective as it could have been. It consisted of a few low-profile charity concerts, a web site, a glossy magazine, and a truck driven around the country with 800-SUICIDE painted on the sides.

Similarly, the reports that KBHK produced on 800-SUICIDE were infrequent and inadequate. In fact, we received so little substantive data from KBHK that after awhile we stopped requesting it.

Most important, though, is that KBHK couldn't pay the phone bills and eventually came within hours of shutting down 800-SUICIDE and related numbers. The future of a life-saving service can't be so precarious. When thousands of people depend on it, the service must be there for them.

Having the federal government and, in particular SAMHSA, take over these numbers is the best way to ensure their continued, uninterrupted operation. Moreover, ever since SAMHSA assumed temporary responsibility of these lines, in partnership with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the service has been exceptionally well managed. The problems that existed during KBHK's tenure have ended. Administration under SAMHSA has been thoughtful, collaborative, highly professional, and conducted with utmost regard for confidentiality and saving lives.

While Reese Butler and KBHK are to be commended for conceiving and launching these lines, operating a national service of this magnitude is much different than founding it.

Public safety is paramount. This is why it's in the best interests of everyone—especially people who are contemplating suicide—that SAMHSA have permanent rights to 800-SUICIDE, 888-SUICIDE, and 877-SUICIDA.